

Hepatitis A Prevention for Men who have Sex with Men

what is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It is a self-limited disease that does not result in chronic (life-long) infection or chronic liver disease.

The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15–50 days). The illness typically has an abrupt onset of symptoms that can include fever, fatigue, anorexia, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes). HAV reproduces in the liver and is found in high concentrations in the stool from about 2 weeks before to about 1 week after onset of illness.

The likelihood of having symptoms with hepatitis A is related to a person's age. Adults are much more likely to be symptomatic than children. Symptoms, if they occur, usually last less than 2 months. Some people are ill for as long as 6 months. About 10%-15% of people infected with HAV will have prolonged or relapsing symptoms over a 6-9 month period.

how is hepatitis A virus spread?

HAV infection is spread by the fecal-oral route primarily through close person-to-person contact, such as household or sex contact with an infected person. Less often, HAV is spread by eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. Measures usually used to prevent the spread of other sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., use of condoms) do not prevent the spread of HAV.

are men who have sex with men at increased risk?

Yes. Hepatitis A disproportionately affects men who have sex with men (MSM). About 10% of all new HAV infections in the United States are among MSM. Although the

overall incidence of hepatitis A has declined in the United States over the past decade, frequent outbreaks continue to be reported among MSM.

how effective is hepatitis A vaccine?

Hepatitis A vaccine has been available since 1995 and is the best way to prevent HAV infection and its consequences. The vaccine is given in a two dose series, separated by at least 6 months.

The vaccine can be given to people who are immune compromised (e.g., people with HIV/AIDS), but these persons might not respond as well to the vaccine.

is the vaccine safe?

Yes. Vaccines to prevent HAV infections are safe and effective. Soreness at the injection site is the most frequently reported side effect. Some people also report headache, loss of appetite, and tiredness after vaccination. The risk of the vaccine causing a serious allergic reaction is extremely small.

what should MSM do to protect themselves?

Talk with your health care professional about getting vaccinated. Hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective, and is your best protection against hepatitis A.

Talk with your health professional about getting tested for other STDs (e.g., syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, HIV).

Ask your health professional about other vaccines you might need (e.g., hepatitis B vaccine).

what if I want more information?

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